NEWSWEEK
4 NOV 1968

ESPIONAGE:

All Honorable Men

For the West German defense establishment the last few weeks have not been happy ones. On Oct. 8, Maj. Gen. Horst Wendland, deputy chief of the BND (Bundesnachrichtendienst), West Germany's equivalent of the CIA, closed the door to his office and blew his brains out with a service revolver. Sadly, officials in Bonn explained that Wendland had long been suffering from depression, forgetfulness and indecisiveness. Ten days later, Lt. Col. Johannes Grimm of the West German defense staff shot himself in *his* office. The official explanation: he was afraid that he had cancer. And on Oct. 21, Gerhard Boehm, a clerk in the West German Defense Ministry, disappeared, leaving behind two suicide notes. Boehm, the government said, was depressed because he had been passed over for promotion.

Well, perhaps. But to any reader of suspense novels, it seemed suggestive that all three of these misadventures—as well as the suicides of three other German officers and bureaucrats—came hard on the heels of the suicide of Rear Admiral Hermann Lüdke, 57. And about Lüdke's motive for killing himself there was scant doubt: he had been a spy, presumably for the Soviet Union.

Impeccable: In the best traditions of espionage, Lüdke was the last man his fellow officers would have suspected of treason. A meticulous military bureaucrat who for the two years before his death had been deputy chief of logistics for NATO, he boasted polished manners, an impeccable personal life and a healthy fondness for outdoor sports. "He was in excellent shape," said the swimming coach at Bonn's American Club, where Lüdke exercised at least three times a week. "Even in a bathing suit, you knew he was a German officer."

Despite his flawless cover, however, Lüdke finally gave himself away with an error so amateurish that any self-respecting author of spy fiction would scorn to employ it. A few days before his scheduled retirement from the West German Navy, Lüdke dropped off a roll of film at a small photo shop in Bonn. When a technician developed the film, he found it contained three pictures of a Lüdke vacation trip—and nine shots of documents labeled "NATO Top Secret."

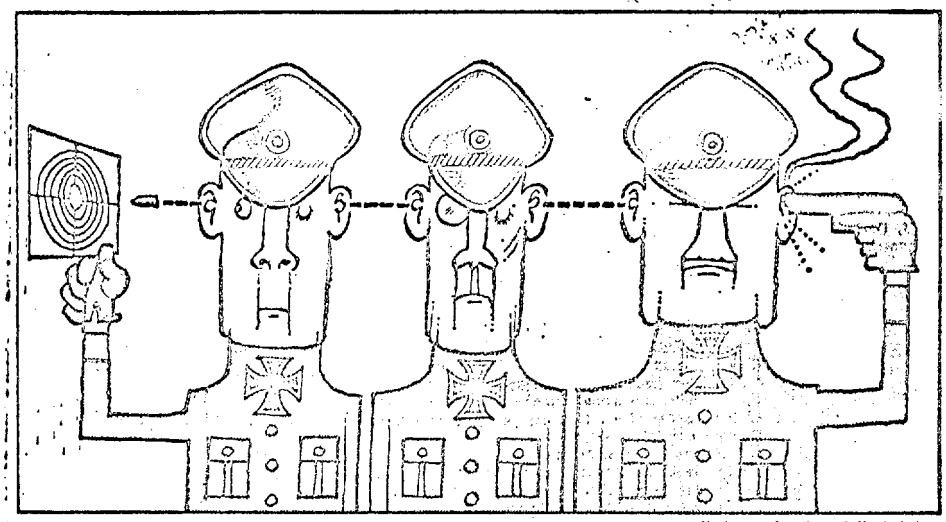
The agitated technician lost no time in alerting the Bonn police, but Lüdke's blunder was promptly matched by the monumental bungling of West German authorities. When the cops went looking for the admiral, they found he was vacationing at his hunting lodge—and no one in the Defense Ministry knew where that was. As a result, no one got a chance to question Lüdke until several days later when he turned up of his own initiative to receive congratulations on his retirement from Defense Minister Gerhard Schröder (who was allowed to shake the admiral's hand in blissful ignorance of his photographic activities). And, by some oversight, counterintelligence investigators neglected to search Lüdke's house until a day after they had interrogated him—thus giving him ample time to dispose of any incriminating evidence.

The ultimate in official incompetence, however, was yet to come. For four solid days, the investigation of Lüdke's activities marked time while the Bonn police tried to establish contact with the office of the federal prosecutor. (Daily phone calls to the prosecutor's office were answered by a porter who declared that the appropriate official was on vacation.) Throughout all this, Lüdke was allowed to move about at will, unfettered by police surveillance. On Oct. 8, taking to a hunting area near the Belgian border. There he loaded his Mauser repeater, placed the barrel to his chest and pulled the trigger.

Only then did West German officials accept the fact that Lüdke had been a spy. And even so, they attempted to minimize his importance. "Admiral Lüdke," muttered one government spokesman, "only had access to files that crossed his desk." But, unfortunately, those files included highly sensitive material on the locations of NATO's atomic stockpiles, its troop deployments and the alliance's emergency planning. "There wasn't much," declared an American on the NATO staff, "that Lüdke couldn't tell the Soviets." And, with somewhat greater realism than their German colleagues, NATO security officers immediately called for a complete reshuffling of atomic bunkers and a revision of secret codes and telephonic "scrambler" devices.

Puzzle: Already some officials were comparing the Lüdke case to the last catastrophic breach of NATO security—the discovery in 1963 that Swedish Col. Stig Wennerström had for years been a Soviet agent. For while no one yet knew exactly how all the pieces of the puzzle fitted together, it seemed likely that the ramifications of the Lüdke case stretched well beyond the borders of West Germany. Intelligence experts recalled that last April an employee of the Italian Foreign Ministry had been arrested with secret NATO documents in his possession. "He turned out to be a Soviet courier," noted one U.S. official last week. And still another factor in the equation was Nahit Imre, a Turkish adviser to NATO Secretary-General Manlio Brosio, caught a few weeks ago in the act of photographing secret papers. According to rumor in intelligence circles, Imre, who is still under interrogation, has come up with information bearing on the Lüdke case.

In all probability, little of the outcome of the Lüdke affair would ever be made public. But clearly both NATO and West German security left much to be desired. (Why, for example, was General Wendland allowed to hold the No. 2 spot in West German intelligence if he was known to be depressed, forgetful and indecisive?) The real question appeared to be whether, in view of the degree of Soviet penetration of its staff, NATO still had any secrets to keep. "You know," remarked one U.S. official, glumly considering the events in West Germany, "we may even be dealing with two spy rings here. In any case, I'm afraid we have only seen the tip of the iceberg so far."



Esskaro—Le Canard Enchaîné

Gallic gibe: 'Suicides in the Bundeswehr—or is militarism really dead?'